

# WILLIAM CARPENTER BOMPAS



Born: January 20th, 1834

Consecrated, First Bishop of Athabasca, May 3rd, 1874

First Bishop of Mackenzie River, 1884

First Bishop of Yukon, 1891

Died: June 9th, 1906

"I know your great Bishop Bompas, and I tell you that the Apostles are living yet."—*Bishop Whipple*.

"In the history of the Church of England, there is no parallel to such a career."—*Eugene Stock*.

"Indisputably the most self-sacrificing bishop in the world."—*Eugene Stock* in "*The History of the C.M.S.*"



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## The Call

"Shall no one come forward to take up the standard of the Lord as it falls from his hands, and to occupy the ground?"

These historic words constitute the call which gave Rev. W. C. Bompas to Canada. Bishop Anderson was preaching the Anniversary Sermon of the Church Missionary Society in St. Bride's Church, London, England, on May 1, 1865. He told of the vast, lone lands of the Canadian North and West, where children of the twilight died without the knowledge of Jesus the Christ. He described one lonely mission-station on the mighty Yukon River, where a soldier of the cross, the Rev. Robert McDonald, with health fast failing, was standing bravely at his post of duty till some one should relieve him.

The service ended, the clergy retired, and the congregation began to disperse. But there was one whose heart had been deeply touched by the speaker's words, and, walking at once into the vestry, a Lincolnshire curate, in the prime of life, offered to go to Canada to relieve the missionary at Fort Yukon.

William Carpenter Bompas, this young volunteer, was born at 11, Park Road, Regent's Park, London, on January 20, 1834. He was the fourth son of Charles Carpenter Bompas, Serjeant-at-Law, one of the most eminent advocates of his day, and leader of the Western Circuit, and of Mary Steele, daughter of Mr. Joseph Tomkins, of Broughton, Hants. Serjeant Bompas, it is said, was the original of Charles Dickens' celebrated character "Serjeant Buzfuz" in the "Pickwick Papers".

William, in early youth, showed most plainly those characteristics which marked his whole life. He was a shy boy, owing partly, no doubt, to private tuition at home, which deprived him to a large extent of the society of other boys. Cricket, football, or such games, he did not play, his chief pleasure being walking, and sketching churches and other buildings that he encountered in his rambles. Gardening he was fond of, and the knowledge thus gained stood him in good stead years later when planning for the mission-farms in his northern Diocese.

The influence of a religious home made a deep and lasting impression upon him. His parents were earnest Christians, belonging to the Baptist denomination. Sunday was strictly observed, the father making it a firm rule never to read briefs or hold consultations on the Day of Rest. Bible reading, too, was carefully observed.

His father died in 1844, when the lad was only ten years old. (It is rather a striking coincidence that so many of the outstanding events in

his life took place in the decades corresponding with the year of his birth—1834, 1844, 1874, 1884).

Leaving the communion of his early associations, he decided to seek ordination in the Church of England, and in 1858 was confirmed by the Bishop of London at St. Mary's, Bryanston Square. His remarkable linguistic ability enabled him soon to add by private study a good knowledge of Hebrew to that of Latin and Greek, which he already possessed.

In 1859 he was accepted by Dr. Jackson, the Bishop of Lincoln, as a literate candidate for Holy Orders, and was ordained deacon by him at the Advent ordination the same year, and appointed curate to the Rev. H. Owen, rector of Trusthorpe and Sutton-in-the-Marsh.

While serving at Sutton, a great sorrow came to him, for in January, 1861, his mother died. He was devotedly attached to her, and was able to take part, with the rest of the family, in ministering comfort to her during her last days.

In 1862 he accepted the curacy of New Radford, Nottingham, a poor and crowded parish, populated largely by lace-workers. The number of souls, about 10,000, within the small triangle of New Radford was about the same as the population of the vast diocese of 900,000 square miles of which he was later to have episcopal supervision.

From Nottingham, Mr. Bompas went for a short time as curate to Holy Trinity, South Lincolnshire, returning in 1864 to his former neighbourhood as curate to the Rev. H. Oldrid at Alford, Lincolnshire. As the earnest curate passed from house to house in his daily work, his parishioners little thought what a bright fire of enthusiasm was burning in his heart. He had been much stirred by the stories told by missionaries of heathen dying without the knowledge of Christ in far-away lands, and he longed to go abroad and bear the message of salvation. The call came in Bishop Anderson's appeal; the seed had fallen on ground prepared to receive it.

He was at once accepted by the Church Missionary Society, and ordained to the priesthood by Bishop, afterwards Archbishop, Machray, who had just been consecrated as successor to Bishop Anderson.

Only *three weeks* did Mr. Bompas have in which to prepare for his long journey; but they were sufficient, as he was anxious to be on his way. So complete was his consecration to the work before him that "he decided," so his brother tells us, "to take nothing with him that might lead back his thoughts to home, and he gave away all his books and other tokens of remembrance, even the paragraph Bible which he had always used."

Shortly after Mr. Bompas was accepted by the Church Missionary Society, he went to Salisbury Square and inquired how far it was to his

mission-field, and the length of time required for the journey. When told it was *about 8000 miles*, and that he was hardly likely to reach it that year, a smile passed over his face as he replied, "I see, I must start with a small bag."

## To His Task

He left London on June 30, 1865, and at Liverpool, he embarked on the steamer "Persia" bound for New York. The story of his journey westward by way of Chicago, then the Red River to Fort Chipewyan is thrilling, but the real hazards were in front of him. Who could conquer that northern stream at such a season? But the missionary only smiled,



and asked for canoe and men. He was given a large craft and three Indian lads.

And once more that dauntless herald of the Cross sped northward. For several days the trim canoe cut the water, driven by determined arms. Then winter swept down in all its fury; the river became full of floating ice, jamming, tearing, and impeding their canoe. Axes were brought to bear; they would cleave a passage. The missionary must not be stopped. How they did work! The ice-chips flew; the spray dashed and drenched them, and then encased their bodies with an icy armour. Colder and colder it grew, and the river became a solid mass from bank to bank. The canoe was dragged ashore, and placed *en cache* on the bank

with their baggage. All around was the pitiless wild. It was a dreary sight to this intrepid traveller, with winter upon him, the bleak wilderness surrounding him, and with very little food. The enthusiasm of a less ardent spirit would have been completely damped; but Mr. Bompas was made of sterner stuff, and without delay he and his companions pushed forward through the forest. On and on they travelled by a circuitous route, through brushwood and thickets, with clothes torn, hands and faces scratched and bleeding, and uncertain where they were. Night shut down and wrapped them in its gloomy mantle. All the next day they struggled forward, without food, and again night overtook them. Still they staggered on, and just when they were wearied to the point of exhaustion the lights of Fort Resolution, on Great Slave Lake, gleamed out in welcome through the darkness.

But could they make Fort Simpson by Christmas Day? They started. Day after day they sped forward. Saturday came, and still they were on the trail, and the next would be Christmas Day. One hundred and seventy-seven days had passed since leaving London, and was he to lose after all, and so very near his destination? But still the dogs raced forward, nearer and nearer, till, oh joy! on Christmas morning the fort hove into sight. There was the flag floating from its tall staff; there were the men crowding around to give their welcome, and among them stood that dauntless pioneer, the Rev. W. W. Kirkby, with great surprise on his face as Mr. Bompas rushed forward and seized him by the hand.

Mr. Kirkby writes: "He remained with us until Easter, and then went on with the packet-men to Great Bear Lake, where I trust God is doubly blessing him.

"Faney! it is not yet a year since he left England, and in that short time he has travelled so far, entered upon his work, and acquired enough of the language to be able to talk to the Indians, in their own tongue, the wonderful works of God. I admire that way of doing things exceedingly, and would accord all honour to him who thus performs his Master's work."

## Facing Northward

The scene of his labours now centres in the wide valley of the Mackenzie—from Fort Chipewyan to Fort Norman and up the Peace to Fort Vermilion.

He plunged into earnest work among the natives, visiting their camps, making journeys some distance away, and patiently studying the language.

The Indians around Great Bear Lake made a special appeal to the noble nature of our Missionary. He sympathized deeply with them in their many troubles, and of them he wrote most pathetically:

"Do the noble ladies of our land, when they wrap around them their highly prized fur, consider that they cannot choose but be indebted for this luxurious boon to the half-naked savage roaming the woods, houseless and homeless, in a temperature nearly 100° below the freezing-point, wrapped in his single blanket, and kindling in the deep snow his solitary fire, owing his preservation and food—not daily food, perhaps—to the one great Father, who regardeth not the rich more than the poor, for they are all one in His hands? Oh, pray for the souls of these poor Indians, that they may become our brethren in Christ, that so their pitiable state on earth may be forgotten in the joys of one common heaven above!"

## To the Dwellers in Arctic Night

In the year of 1870, he decided to visit Eskimos in the farthest North, accompanied by two native Eskimos. He was attacked by snow-blindness.

"The effect of this is to produce, after a time, acute inflammation of the eyes. These, in the end, may be so entirely closed as to involve a temporary blindness, accompanied by much smarting pain. . . . The voyager feels very helpless during the acute stage of snow-blindness, and, like Elymas the sorcerer, or St. Paul himself, he 'seeks some one to lead him by the hand'."

For three days in awful darkness he was led by the hand of the native boy, making about twenty-five miles a day, till the first Eskimo camp was reached. It was only a snow-house, and to enter it with closed eyes, stumbling at every step, was a most disagreeable introduction.

After one day of rest in the snow-house, he recovered his sight, and then, moving forward, reached another camp, and at last found himself among the Eskimo tribes.

He studied their religious instincts, and found they were very low. They were addicted to lying, stealing, and even stabbing. "They practised heathen dances, songs, and conjuring, and placed much dependence upon spells and charms."

Though he found them at times very treacherous, yet there was a spirit of true hospitality still existing, which he felt could be fanned into a flame, and which would work a great change. His own difficulty was

the language, and he maintained that the best hope would be to bring a Christian Eskimo from Labrador, as the Moravian missionaries there and in Greenland had mastered the language in the course of many years' labour.

His great friend among the Eskimo was the old chief, Shipataitook by name, who had at the first invited him to visit them, offered the missionary the use of his camp, and entertained and fed him with the greatest kindness and cordiality. He had taken such a fancy to the brave young white man that he could not see him harmed, for the Eskimos were plotting to murder our missionary because they believed he was the cause of their troubles with the ice.

On June 14 the ice left them and the river became clear, and without more detention they continued on their way, "and arrived safely, by God's help," says Mr. Bompas, "at Peel's River Fort on June 18, about midnight."

Never again was Mr. Bompas able to visit that band of Eskimo along the Mackenzie River, but he ever held them in mind, and often his heart went out to them, and he declared that "there was nothing warmer than the grasp of a Husky's hand."

Bishop Stringer, who more than twenty years later travelled a good deal with Takachikima, son of Chief Shipataitook, says:

"Takachikima was a young boy at that time. Several times he asked me about the white man who lived with his father long ago, and he moaned the fact that they treated him so shamefully. 'Why would they not listen to him?' he used to say. 'We were like dogs. We know now what our fathers missed.'"

## "In Journeyings Often"

The next three years find the apostle of the North in endless journeys. Sixteen weeks in a canoe brought him to Fort Vermilion, and at this time he vaccinated over 500 natives, for the smallpox was attacking the Indians and deaths were innumerable. He worked his way to the headwaters of the Peace, back by way of Hay River to Fort McPherson and over the mountains to Fort Yukon. Here the call came to him to be made Bishop of this vast lone land, and in July 1873, he turned eastward to England. His arrival at Winnipeg was marked by a humorous incident.

It is said that when Mr. Bompas reached the episcopal residence and inquired for Bishop Machray, the servant mistook him for a tramp (in his rough travelling clothes), and told him his master was very busy, and

could not be disturbed. So insistent was the stranger that the servant went to the Bishop's study and told him a tramp was at the door determined to see him.

"He is hungry, no doubt," replied the Bishop; "take him into the kitchen and give him something to eat."

Accordingly Mr. Bompas was ushered in, and was soon calmly enjoying a plateful of soup, at the same time urging that he might see the master of the house. Hearing the talking, and wondering who the insistent stranger could be, the Bishop appeared in the doorway, and great was his astonishment to see before him the veteran missionary.

"Bompas!" he cried, as he rushed forward, "is it you?"

We can well realize how Mr. Bompas must have enjoyed this little scene, and the surprise of the good and noble Bishop of Rupert's Land.

## Consecrated Bishop

He at last arrived in England and on May 3, he and John McLean were elevated to the Episcopate. Bishop Bompas was not to return alone to his great work, for a few days after his consecration, May 7, he was united in marriage to Miss Charlotte Selina Cox by Bishop Anderson, assisted by the Rev. John Robins, Vicar of St. Peter's, Notting Hill, and the Rev. Henry Gordon, Rector of Harting. Mrs. Bompas was a woman of much refinement and devotion to the mission cause.

The Bishop and Mrs. Bompas, on May 12, 1874, set their faces towards their great field of labour. Friends and loved ones came to bid them farewell, among whom was Bishop Anderson, late of Rupert's Land, who presented the Bishop with a beautiful paten for his cathedral in the new Diocese of Athabasca. The steamship *China*, of the Cunard Line, received them, and soon she was cutting her way through the water bound for New York. Consecrated, married, and sailed all in one week! Such was the record of the Bishop, who declared it was the hardest week he ever experienced. Never again was he to look upon the shores of his native land, or visit the scenes of childhood; the northern wilds of Canada needed him, and there he remained till the last.

## His Dog Team

Fort Simpson was chosen by the Bishop as his abode at first. It is situated at the confluence of the Mackenzie and Liard Rivers, and formed the most central and convenient point for managing the vast diocese of 1,000,000 square miles. This position had been occupied years before

by the Hudson Bay Company, and here, in 1859, Mr. Kirkby built the church and mission-house.

Three hundred miles from Fort Simpson was another post of the Hudson Bay Company, Fort Rae. Here was a band of Indians who needed the message of the Gospel, and the Bishop decided to go to them. Together with several men from Fort Rae he set out, having with his sled Allen Hardisty, an Indian who was being trained as a catechist.

"It was a clear, beautiful morning," says Mrs. Bompas, "November 27, 1874. The great frozen river glittered in the sunshine. Not a smooth, glassy surface, but all covered with huge boulders of ice, and these again all thickly strewn with snow. . . . Here are our 'trippers,' as they are called, and all ready to start, and my Bishop in his fur cap, and warm wraps which I have made for him. His large mittens, formed of deer-skin and fur, are suspended from the neck, as is the custom here. Allen, the catechist, packed the sledges last evening with their bags of clothing and provisions for the way—blankets, cooking implements, etc. There are three sledges, and the dogs ready harnessed. I am rather proud of my 'tapis,' which amid sundry difficulties, I contrived to get finished, with some help, in time. Now comes the word, 'Off! all ready!' Our farewells are said, the drivers smack their whips, the dogs cry out and start in full scamper, the trippers running by the side of their sledges at such a pace that they are soon out of sight."



*"Travelling with Dog Team"*

Many were the dangers they faced together. On one occasion the Bishop did not go ahead, as was his custom. He lagged behind the sled, travelling slower and slower all the time. Natsatt kept looking back, and when at length the Bishop disappeared from sight, he became alarmed. "Me no feel easy," he presently remarked; "me not comfortable." Leaving the rest of the party, who swung on their way, he went back to look for the Bishop. Soon he found him, helpless, in the middle of the trail, bent double, with hands on his knees, trying to walk. He had been seized with fearful cramps, which were rendering him powerless. Natsatt made a fire as quickly as possible, and rubbed the Bishop thoroughly, and after the suffering man was well warmed, with a great effort succeeded in getting him back to the fort. The day was extremely cold—40 degrees below zero. A few minutes more, and the Bishop would have perished on the trail.

The Bishop loved the little ones of his dusky flock, and never was he so happy as when they were gathered around him. For long years he was their patient teacher, and gladly did he give up some of his time each day for their sake. Indian children are full of fun and mischief, and many were the pranks they would play upon their venerable teacher. Shrewd, too, were they to watch the effect of their capers. They knew they could go so far and no farther. When they saw the Bishop running his fingers through his hair they knew a storm was brewing and silence would ensue.

During his long years in the North, over such a vast sweep of country, he had relieved and saved many a little waif. He could not bear to see them suffer, and sometimes his eyes were blinded to their imperfections. Once, hearing the sobs of a child who was being chastised, he marched to the schoolroom door and sought admittance. This not being complied with immediately, with a mighty push he drove open the door, seized the child from the teacher's grasp, and, placing it upon his knee, soothed it with parental affection.

## Jeannie

A beautiful scene is that which shows us the Bishop seeking for one of his flock, a little girl who had wandered into the wilderness. Jeannie de Nord was a child of ten years, with a complexion scarcely darker than an ordinary English gipsy. A rogue she looked, and a little rogue she was, up to all sorts of fun and mischief. Her father, old de Nord, had left her with an aunt while he went away some distance to hunt. The aunt was neglectful of her little charge, and Jeannie, unable to bear this,

started in search of her father. So little did the aunt care that two days elapsed before the word spread that Jeannie was lost.

No sooner did the Bishop hear of it than, like the true shepherd he was, he started with others in search of the little wanderer. They pushed on over the snow, following the girl's tracks, for she had taken her snow-shoes with her. She had no food or blanket, and the nights were cold, and starving wolves roamed the forests. And where was Jeannie? She had reached her father's abandoned camp one night, cold and tired. Groping about, she found his gun, which had been left there, and with the cunning of the wild she discharged the weapon, and from the spark thus obtained started a fire, which kept her warm through the night. All the next day she wandered in vain, searching for her father, and, tired and hungry, crept back to the abandoned camp and fell asleep. It was in the night that the rescue-party drew near, and some distance away discharged a gun to attract the girl's attention. Jeannie heard the report and, thinking it was her father coming back, with a sigh of relief fell asleep again on her cold bed. When she next opened her eyes, it was to see before her the tall figure of the anxious Bishop, and to feel his strong loving arms around her as he lifted her from the ground, while the only word she uttered was: "Ti tin die," ("I am hungry").

The shepherd had found the lost lamb, but oh, at what a cost! The Bishop's clothes were soaking from the overflowing streams they had crossed as they wandered about, and he could hardly reach Fort Simpson, so great were the cramps which seized him, and for days he endured great suffering. But what did it matter? Little Jeannie de Nord was safe, and none the worse for her experience.

Four years later the Bishop was called upon to lay poor Jeannie to rest. Her father made her work harder than she was able. One day she started with the dogs and sledge for the woods, to bring in a deer her father had killed. The journey was a long one, and when she returned to the camp tired out she complained of not feeling well, and, lying down on her bed of brushwood, died the next day.

## The First Synod

The first Synod of this huge Diocese was held at Fort Simpson on September 4, 1876.

Though small, it was still an interesting assemblage which met on that early September day, unlike any Synod ever before held. Foremost of the three clergy was the Ven. Archdeacon Robert McDonald, who had come from Fort McPherson, on Peel River. Noble champion of the faith,

he had endured more than all the rest in sickness and hardships for the Master's sake. Next came the Rev. W. D. Reeve, who at that time was steadily making his mark in the great work, and upon whom in after-years devolved the care of the Churches in the diocese of Mackenzie River. The third was the Rev. Alfred Garrioch, who is still living and resides in Winnipeg.

## To The Pacific

The following year, 1877, marks a remarkable journey of this Missionary of the Cross. The Bishop was asked to visit the Pacific Coast at Metlakahtla.

It was a cold, frosty day, that 8th of October, 1877, when the Bishop left Dunvegan in a stout canoe, with several Indians, on his long race to the coast against stern winter. For five days they moved up the river, contending with drifting ice, which met them coming out of "tributary streams," and on the 13th Fort St. John's was reached, where they "were kindly entertained for the Sunday by the officer in charge" of the Hudson Bay post. From this point they left winter "behind for a fortnight, and were fairly ahead in the race." But every day they expected to be overtaken by their competitor, and arose from their "couches anxiously every morning, foreboding signs of ice or snow."

Rocky Mountain House was reached on the 17th, where a large band of Indians was found assembled. The Bishop lost no opportunity of speaking a word to the natives wherever he met them, and the seed thus sown bore much fruit in after years. For the first time he found no sickness in the camps, which fact he attributed "to their unusually liberal use of soap and water, as compared with the tribes farther north."

Ahead of them was the Peace River Canyon, and, after making a land portage of twelve miles to overcome this dangerous spot, they again proceeded by canoe. But the work was becoming harder all the time. The current was very swift, and the canoe had to be poled all the way. In trying to ascend the Parle Pas Rapids, the current was so "strong that their canoe turned on them, and was swept down the stream, but, being a large one, descended safely."

"Most of the time that we were passing through the gorge of the Rocky Mountains the weather was foggy, but when the mist cleared we saw the bold crags and hilly heights closely overhanging the river in snowy grandeur. The mountain terraces and picturesque scenery on this route have been described by Canadian explorers."

"On the very morning that we left Parsnip River," wrote the Bishop,

"the ice began agin to drift thickly to meet us, and had we been only a few hours later, we might have been inconvenienced by it, showing us that stern winter was still on our track."

From Fort Babine they started on the land-trail over the mountains to Skeena Forks. This was a difficult undertaking, and winter overtook them once again. Beginning the portage, the snow was several inches deep, and as they ascended the mountain it deepened continually, till they were forced to dig out their camp, "to sleep in a foot and a half of snow, and without snow-shoes the walking was heavy. We were invading winter's own domain," continued the Bishop, "and it was little wonder if he was severe with us."

At Port Essington, the little town at the mouth of the Skeena, Mr. Morrison, the missionary in charge, one day, November 23, saw a stranger approaching in a canoe. His clothes were torn and ragged, his face bronzed from wind and sun, while his long, uncombed beard swept his breast. So travel-worn was the man that Mr. Morrison mistook him for a miner as he disembarked. "Well," said he, "what success have you had?" The Bishop replied that he had been fairly successful, evidently relishing the joke. Just then Mr. Morrison saw the remains of the episcopal apron, and, remembering that he had heard that a Bishop was expected at Metlakahtla from inland, exclaimed: "Perhaps you are the Bishop who I heard was expected?" "Yes," was the reply, "I am all that is left of him." "This is the tenth canoe that we have sat in since leaving Duncan."

Brave soldier of the Cross, how willing he was to sacrifice anything for the Master's cause! Leaving the coast, he started in the spring up the Skeena River, and once again plunged into the wilderness among his dusky flock.

## Famine

It was not only at one place or one season that the famine came. It was a common occurrence. Once, in 1886, the Bishop held his Synod at Fort Simpson. There was a scarcity of food, the beginning of the great famine which ensued, and all were placed on short allowance. One day the dinner consisted of barley and a few potatoes, but it is said that the Bishop was equal to the occasion, commanding the scanty fare by repeating Proverbs xv, 17: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

The winter that followed the meeting of the clergy was a terrible one. The famine increased. Game was scarce, few moose were to be

obtained, the rabbits all died, and the fish nearly all left the river. The Indians asserted that the scarcity of the finny prey was caused by the propeller of the new steamer *Wrigley*, which first churned the head-waters of the great river the preceding fall, but was unable to reach the northern posts owing to the ice; hence the lack of supplies. But any excuse would serve the Indians, as, on a previous occasion when fish were scarce (so Mrs. Bompas tells us), the natives said it was due to the white women bathing in the river. Such a radical change as cleanliness was evidently as much disliked by the fish as by the Indians.

The mission party were placed on half rations, and earnest prayers were offered up to the great Father above for deliverance. Starving wolves were seen prowling around, ready to snatch up anything, carrying off little children if they ventured near. "We are just hanging on by our eyelashes," quaintly wrote Mrs. Bompas.

The Bishop starved himself to feed his household, and daily he became thinner and more haggard. At last the provisions were so reduced that the Bishop, to lessen the number at the Fort, left for another place. He seldom thought of himself, but only of those dependent upon him. He could live anywhere, even in a snow-bank, with a few scraps of food. Truly his wants were few.

"An iron cup, plate, or knife," writes Mr. Spendlove, "with one or two kettles, form his culinary equipment. A hole in the snow, a corner of a boat, wigwam, or log-hut, provided space, six feet by two feet, for sleeping accommodation. Imagine him seated on a box in a twelve-foot room, without furniture, and there cooking, teaching, studying, early and late, always at work, never at ease, never known to take a holiday."

## The Diocese Divided

We have seen how when Mr. Bompas was consecrated Bishop of the Diocese of Athabasca, he had charge of a vast region of one million square miles. In 1884, finding the field too large, he had it divided, the northern portion being called Mackenzie River, which the Bishop took as his own. Here he carried on the work east and west of the Rocky Mountains for several years. But finding the task too great for one man—owing partly to the influx of miners along the Yukon River—he again had a division made in 1890, the region west of the mountains thus becoming the Diocese of Selkirk (now Yukon). Archdeacon Reeve became Bishop of the Mackenzie River Diocese, while Bishop Bompas decided to go into the regions beyond across the mountains.

## Alone

Often the Bishop and his faithful wife,—“The Heroine of the North” were separated for long periods.

Leaving Fort Norman, he went again across the Rocky Mountains, and spent the winter of 1891-92 at the lonely rampart-house. He did not mind the loneliness, for he spent the time at his beloved studies. In the spring, when the snow had disappeared from the land, he would walk through the woods drinking in the beautiful things of Nature.

In the spring, after the ice had gone out, he went down the Porcupine River to the Yukon. It was here he met Mrs. Bompas, who was returning from England. They had not met since 1887, and Mrs. Bompas vividly describes this meeting. After speaking about the trip up the river from St. Michael's, she mentions the great excitement which ensued on July 26, when “two Indians came on board, bringing news of the Bishop, who is at the next village, ‘Showman.’ But a delay took place owing to the boiler being cleaned, and it was not until midnight that ‘two bells’ sounded, a signal for the boat to stop. I pricked up my ears, and then another bell, which meant, ‘Stop her.’ It must be for wood, of course; but I sprang from my berth, and looked out of my small window to see a pretty Indian camp, and—my husband on the beach, grey and weather-beaten, but in health better than I had expected!”



“Buxton Mission, Forty Mile, home of Bishop and  
Mrs. Bompas in the early days”

Right: Bishop Bompas.



From here they went up the river to Forty Mile, where there was a large camp of miners and Indians. In a log-house the Bishop and his faithful wife took up their new burden among complete strangers. Their special work was among the Indians, and for the children a school was at once started. There was much to do about the place—repairs of all kinds to be made, and the Bishop was kept very busy.

## Over The Mountains

To his new Diocese he gave the name, "Selkirk".

"Selkirk, I presume, may be shortened from 'Selig Kirke,' or 'Holy Church,' which does not seem offensive as the name of a diocese. Manitoba means, I suppose, 'Spirit Narrows,' and Athabasca, 'Plenty of Narrows,' and Saskatchewan, 'Strong Current,' and Moosonee, 'Moose Deer Walk,' and Qu'Appelle, 'Who Calls?' And I hardly see why 'Selkirk' should be deemed an inferior name to these." However, "Selkirk" was afterwards changed to "Yukon."

The town of Forty Mile now became the See City for the Bishop.

In January, 1895, the Bishop gave a description of Forty Mile: "A town is laid down at Forty Mile, and they have two doctors, library, reading-room, debating society, theatre, eating-houses, and plenty of saloons, as public-houses are called in the West, besides two stores, or shops, and a few tradesmen. One debate was as to which has caused most misery in the past century—war or whisky? It was decided to give the enviable preference to whisky. This was truly appropriate to a mining camp. They had a feast on New Year's Day, of which every soul in the neighbourhood was invited to partake, both whites and Indians."

Yet the miners had the profoundest respect for the Bishop and his devoted wife. Though many of them were indifferent to all things spiritual, still, they could admire nobleness when they beheld it, as they did every day in the two faithful soldiers of the Cross in their midst. As a token of their esteem, on Christmas Day, 1892, a splendid nugget of gold was presented to Mrs. Bompas, "as the first white lady who has wintered among us".

## Gold

Little did the Bishop realize that an event was taking place in his diocese which in less than a year would change the whole aspect of mission-work.

About fifty miles up stream from Forty Mile the Klondyke River joins the Yukon. From time immemorial this had been a favourite Indian fishing resort, and on various occasions missionaries had gone up from Forty Mile and held services for the natives. Little did they think, when pitching their tents at the confluence of these two streams, what a change would take place there in a few years.

In July, 1896, George W. Carmack, with several Indian associates, made the famous gold discovery, news of which soon travelled abroad and thrilled the world with intense excitement.

*May 28, 1897*—"I hear now that the creeks are so winding as to make the gold streak extend 200 or 300 miles. I am told £4,000 was washed from the earth of one claim in one day. Another bought a claim for £10,000, and paid it all off out of the ground in two or three months. The richest claims are thought to be worth £100,000 to £200,000. (A claim is 600 feet of the creek, which each miner is allowed to pick for himself at the start.) . . . From one to two dollars per pan is reported to be a common rate there."

"For myself, during the past winter, I have enjoyed more ease and leisure than usual, from having more helpers around me, and I have devoted my days to digging the mines of God's holy Word, and have found, in my own estimation, richer prizes than the nuggets of Klondyke."

Rev. R. J. Bowen (now living at London, Ont.) was sent to work at Dawson, where he worked manfully and well.

A log church was at first built, and called "St. Paul's". When Dawson grew to be a large city, this was replaced by a new frame church which cost \$14,000. The Bishop was worried about his work, and this worry, together with improper food, brought on a severe attack of scurvy, and when he went back to Forty Mile in April, he was in a very weak condition. Yet, notwithstanding his illness, he persisted in conducting the Indian school and attending to his correspondence.

"I cannot move," he wrote, "without losing my breath, nor walk a few steps without great pain. If I can hold on till I obtain green vegetables, they may benefit me."

After a time "green vegetables" reached him from Dawson, and at once an improvement took place. To these the Bishop declared his recovery was almost entirely due.

At this time Mrs. Bompas was stranded at Fort Yukon for eight long months, thirty miles within the Arctic Circle. Fortunately, the Rev. John Hawkesly and family were stationed here, who did what they could for her comfort. But to the Bishop at Forty Mile, in feeble health, disturbing news arrived of the riotous times among the miners at Fort Yukon, and their desperate efforts to overpower the American soldiers. Such information caused him much anxiety, and most thankful was he when at length the ice ran out of the river, and Mrs. Bompas was able to continue her way after the long delay.

The following summer the Bishop turned his attention to the southern part of his diocese.

## Carcross

The welcome at Caribou Crossing was most meagre. A tent which belonged to Bishop Ridley gave them shelter for a few hours, when, hearing of a bunkhouse across the river, they at once rented it, and afterwards purchased it for \$150. It was dirty and uncomfortable, but the Bishop placed a rug and blanket on the big table for Mrs. Bompas to rest while he went to explore. The house was infested with gophers, which ran along the rafters, causing great annoyance.

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"See House, Carcross"

In 1903, Bishop Ridley, of Caledonia, paid a visit to Caribou Crossing on his way to Atlin. The description he gives of the episcopal residence and the life of the venerable occupants is most interesting, a few extracts of which must be given here:

"There on the platform stands the strait and venerable hero of the North, Dr. Bompas, the Bishop of Selkirk. I jumped from the train and, though I had never met him before, I grasped his hand and exclaimed, 'At last! At last!' We knew each other well by letter only. He was as placid as the mountains and the lakes they embosom."

Then a glimpse is given of the "Bishop's house, built of logs, on the sand. The flooring-boards were half an inch apart, so shrunken were they that it would be easy to rip them up and lay them down close together. Then the roof: it was papered, with battens across the paper. I was anxious to see inside less of the light of heaven through the rents. Ventilation is carried to excess. Everything around is as simple as indifference to creature comforts can make it, excepting the books, which are numerous, up to date, and as choice as any two excellent scholars could wish."

## To Winnipeg

Anxious days followed the Bishop's removal to this place. Clergy were scarce in the diocese, and when Mr. Bowen left Whitehorse earnest appeals were sent "outside" for men. Then it was, upon the Bishop's earnest request, that the Rev. I. O. Stringer arrived in November, 1903, to take up the work laid down by Mr. Bowen. Much pleased was the Bishop to have Mr. Stringer so near, and at once marked him as his successor.

Then followed the death of his old friend Archbishop Machray, and as senior Bishop of the province of Rupert's Land he was summoned to Winnipeg. A message reached him, telling him of the Archbishop's death, with the addition: "As senior Bishop it is important that you should attend a conference of Bishops in Winnipeg to select a successor."

Though the Bishop shrank much from leaving the north to mingle with the bustling world, yet after a few minutes' thought, he sent back the following answer:

"I will try to be with you by Easter."

And on Easter Eve, April, 1904, with Mrs. Bompas, and Susie, a little deaf-and-dumb girl, he was met by several of the clergy at Winnipeg, and was present at St. John's Cathedral on Easter Day, though only as one of the congregation, being too much overcome by the crowd and bustle of the city to take any active part in the service.

This was the second time that the Bishop had left his Northern home since 1865,—39 years.

"This 'hiding of self' was typical of the man. His life was 'hid with Christ in God,' and he hid the activities of it in an unselfish shrinking from the world's gaze," writes Archbishop Matheson.

## Home Again

He at once returned to Cariboo Crossing, now called Carcross and continued his work. "The daily round, the common task," was all that he asked for. Praise might go to others, he wished for none for himself. The Indian school occupied much of his time, and part of each morning was given up to it. The building over the river, which at first had been used for the school, was exchanged for the log police-barracks, quite close to the mission-house. It was an interesting sight to observe the venerable, grey-haired teacher among a number of stirring young Indian pupils. Gladly did he leave his beloved translations to be awhile the teacher.

## Eventide

Such a calm, such a change from turmoil into peace, marked the evening of the life we have been considering. We believe that God's servants have been given a premonition of the approach of death. The Bishop had laid his plans some months ahead, and made necessary preparations for a winter down the river. He had always been remarkable for physical strength and energy. For his winter travelling he was always seen running, with the jaunty pace of the Northern tripper, ahead of his sledge. He was ever ready to help the men hauling up a boat at some of the portages, or in pushing it down the bank into the river. Among his party it was always the Bishop who insisted on charging himself with the heaviest articles, and it was only within the last two years that he abstained from hauling water from the lake for the whole of that household. But symptoms of some diminution of strength and vigour in this strong man were beginning to show themselves. The eyes that had pored so long with imperfect light over the pages of Hebrew and Syriac, in which he so delighted, were failing, and had to be strengthened by glasses stronger and yet stronger still. Since his last attack of scurvy he had lost all

sense of smell or taste. No one could be with the Bishop many hours without observing an expression of weariness and dejection in his countenance, which was as intense as pathetic. He was often heard whispering, "Courage, courage!" To more than one of his friends he had given his impression that he had not long to live.

The Bishop's burden of responsibility had of late years been greatly increased by the advent of the white men. The population of the diocese had increased sevenfold and at rapid strides. The problem of providing for the spiritual needs of these people, and especially of keeping the Indians from the allurements of the whisky traffic and the snares of the gambling-table, was weighing heavily upon him. But the darkest hour is the hour before the dawn; the labourer's task was nearly accomplished. The Rev. I. O. Stringer had been nominated by the Bishop and approved by the Church Missionary Society and the Canadian Board of Missions as successor to Bishop Bompas in the See of Selkirk (now called the See of Yukon). He was a good man and an earnest Churchman, and had had some years' experience of mission-work among the Indians of Peel River and the Eskimo of Herschel Island, at the mouth of the Mackenzie. Mr. Stringer was consecrated Bishop in St. John's Cathedral, Winnipeg, December 17, 1905, and his arrival in Selkirk Diocese was ardently looked for. But the end was drawing near. It was June 9, 1906. He had been up to the school, and on to the Indian camp to visit some sick Indians. Then he went home, and remained for some time in conversation with Bishop Stringer, into whose hands he had already committed all the affairs of the diocese. Then the mission-party dined together, and at eight o'clock they all reassembled for prayers. After prayers the Bishop retired to his study and shut the door.

"Was there, we wonder, any intimation of the coming rest in the breast of that stalwart warrior, whose end of life was now so near as to be reckoned, not by hours, but by minutes only? Was there any consciousness of having fought a good fight, and finished his course? We know not. Sitting on a box, as was his custom, he began the sermon which proved to be his last. Presently the pen stopped: the hand that so often had guided it was to do so no more. Near him was one of his flock, an Indian girl, who needed some attention, and as he arose he leaned his elbow on a pile of boxes. And while standing there the great call came; the hand of God touched him, and the body which had endured so much fell forward. When Bishop Stringer reached his side a few minutes later, the Indian girl was holding his head in her lap. Nothing could be done, and without a struggle, without one word of farewell, the brave soul passed forth to a higher life.

"And so the tale is told, the chapter ended, of that life begun seventy-two years since. A suffering, quiet, uneventful life, and yet, we hope, not all unfruitful of God's glory, and of souls won for the fold of the Good Shepherd.

There is a humble grave in one of the loveliest and most secluded spots in the Yukon territory. Dark pine-forests guard that grave. During the winter months pure, untrodden snow covers it. It is enclosed by a rough fence made of fir-wood, which an Indian woodman cut down and trimmed, leaving the bark on, and then fixed strong and stable around the grave. But none will disturb that spot: no foot of man or beast will dishonour it; the sweet notes of the Canadian robin and the merry chirp of the snow-bird are almost the only sounds which break the silence of that sacred place. The Indians love that grave; the mission children visit it at times with soft steps and hushed voices to lay some cross of wild flowers or evergreen upon it. There is a grey granite headstone with the words, "In the peace of Christ," and the name and age of him who rests beneath. It is the grave of Bishop Bompas.



*Archdeacon Canham* writes,—“He was cheerful, affectionate, reliable, humble, self denying, generous, saintly, faithful and true.

He would share all that he had with anyone, even to the last crumb. Often he was imposed upon. He was there as God's Messenger and his sole aim and object was to win souls for Christ.”

As Bishop of Selkirk, he came to Yukon in 1892. His coming was made memorable by holding his first Diocesan Synod on a travelling steamer ascending the Yukon River.

I was in charge of Carcross from 1910 to 1916, and occupied the Episcopal Palace (?) in which Bishop Bompas lived and died."

*His Grace the Archbishop of Rupert's Land*, (Archbishop Stringer), sends this message—

"I was associated with Bishop Bompas for some time, and saw him quite frequently during the last three years of his life. I was with him also at the time of his death. One thing which I shall remember in connection with Bishop Bompas is that he was the most unselfish man I ever met. He never thought of himself and was ever ready to give up everything and anything for the sake of others. This does not mean that he never asserted himself because he was always conscious of the responsibility of his position as Bishop and did not hesitate to express his mind on any questions that came before him for consideration.

While I was Rector at Whitehorse, Yukon, Bishop Bompas visited us weekly coming over on the train from Carcross—46 miles—in order to do the necessary shopping for the Carcross School. He carried any kind of a bag with him to do his shopping. Mrs. Stringer had a comfortable bed prepared for him in a room upstairs but he always preferred to sleep on a couch in the living room thinking it would give less trouble. He always seemed happier when he was allowed to do so."

*Rev. R. J. Bowen* bears this testimony,—

"His life was that of a Bishop, Missionary and student. Languages seemed to be his hobby and delight. In addition to many Indian dialects his diversion seemed to be the critical study of Syriac, Hebrew, Greek, Latin. I remember his delight upon opening a parcel I brought for him, from England. It was a Syriac Hebrew Lexicon. His books were his constant companions and his discourses were enlightening and entertaining.

Rarely could he be lured into speaking of the exploits of his youth. Occasionally he would tell of the beginning of work in Athabasca, Mackenzie, his visit to the Eskimos and his first visit to the Yukon. The esteem in which he was held by the natives bore testimony to his self-sacrificing life."

*Mrs. R. J. Bowen* writes of his love of music,—

"His delight when visiting Dawson was very marked. He enjoyed the Church service with choir and music beyond description, and when one of the choir sang as a solo, 'Consider the Lilies', he remarked, 'I have

*"Bishop Bompas Memorial Church, Moosehide"*

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In the preparation of this booklet, I have used the following books,—  
“An Apostle of the North”, by Venerable H. A. Cody, to whom the Canadian Church owes a great debt; “Bishop Bompas of the Frozen North”, by Nigel B. M. Grahame; “A Heroine of the North”, by S. A. Archer; “Diocese of Maekenzie River”, (S.P.C.K.)—by Bishop Bompas; “History of the Church Missionary Society”, by Eugene Stock; “The Symetry of Scripture”, by Bishop Bompas; “Northern Lights on the Bible”, by Bishop Bompas; Letters and Articles, by Archbishop Stringer, Archdeacon Canham, Rev. R. J. Bowen and Mrs. R. J. Bowen, and Rev. A. C. Garrioch, as well as information from Rev. John Hawksley and Rev. Canon Totty. To all I express my thanks.

A. H. S.

heard nothing like that for forty years'. His loss for His Master's sake was very real."

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Your Prayers are earnestly asked for the work which Bishop Bompas began and for the workers who today are manning the Posts in Athabasca, Yukon and the Western Arctic.

Almighty God, we give Thee humble and hearty thanks for Thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men. We thank Thee for the light of Thy Gospel, the labours of Thy ministers, and the ministrations of Thy Church. Above all, we bless Thy holy name for those who have laboured, suffered, and died for Thy sake in the waste places of the earth; beseeching Thee to give us grace to follow their good examples, that with them we may at last attain to Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*